

## Celtic Sanctity, Spirituality and Hagiography (HPCS7005)

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Words: 5250 (including quotes)

Brief

### TASK 2

Write ONE essay of 5,000 words on ONE of the following topics:

Chosen:

2. Analyse a range of motifs found in one version of the Life of any saint from the Celtic regions (e.g. St Patrick, David, Brigid, Ursula, Cadog, Illtud, Winefride).

# Title: Analysis of the motifs found in the Confessio, St Patrick.

## Introduction

St Patrick's Confessio can be seen as a pseudo-autobiography of the life of the Saint. As such it presents us with a first-hand account of the life of St Patrick. It allows us a perspective on St Patrick's life and activities that highlights motifs and themes that were contemporary and familiar to St Patrick. It also naturally does not include common themes to some other hagiographical texts such as those surrounding his death and does not present us with cultic complexities that compound following any saint's death. Although St Patrick was not attempting to catalogue events in his life, contrary to an autobiography<sup>1</sup>, is it nevertheless an account of the saint's life filled with motifs familiar to St Patrick and the traditions contemporary with him. With these considerations and for these reasons I have chosen this account of the Life of St Patrick. I have chosen McCarthy's relatively recent English translation as my core reference to the Confessio but have consulted others,<sup>2 3</sup> particularly Freeman, who translated the Confessio twice, when requiring further context.<sup>4 5</sup>

The exact dates of St Patrick's life are uncertain, however his arrival in Ireland is often placed in 432 with his death in 461. McCarthy's translation cites 8 handwritten manuscripts as sources, the earliest and most important is dated at 807 from the Book of Armagh, 346 years after St Patrick's death.

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<sup>1</sup> McGrath Isabella Christina, 'Issues of Translation & His Enduring Pastoral Message' (Drew University 2021) 70–71.

<sup>2</sup> McGrath Isabella Christina (n 1).

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Bieler, 'Muirchú's Life of St. Patrick as a Work of Literature' (1974) 43 *Medium Ævum* 219 <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/43628033>>.

<sup>4</sup> Pádraig McCarthy, *My Name Is Patrick: St Patrick's Confessio* (Royal Irish Academy 2008) <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt14jxtjc.2>>.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Freeman, *St. St Patrick of Ireland*, vol 90 (Simon & Schuster 2005).

St Patrick lived during a period where Christianity and its institutions were becoming ever more important however its influence still exhibited shifting and blurred boundaries with existing pagan beliefs and local authorities.<sup>6</sup> St Patrick portrays his growing belief that everything on earth happens as decreed by God as detailed by Johnston<sup>7</sup>, particularly evident in his *Confessio*, where he sees God guiding his own story. The *Confessio*, although an autobiography in more or less chronological order, it weaves themes and motifs throughout. These motifs are naturally derived from Christian traditions, however they also include pagan and political influences which flavour their style and use. The following analysis will highlight a range of these motifs.

Motifs are understood here as follows:

A definition of motif found from a folklorist follows, "A motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. In order to have this power it must have something unusual and striking about it".<sup>8</sup> However, considering the context of St Patrick's *Confessio*, a more nuanced understanding of broader and more general themes will initially be considered, then more specific elements and individual motifs will be highlighted and analysed.

## Original Sources:

St. St Patrick's *Confessio* survives in several manuscripts, which are key to studying the original text of his writings:

- Book of Armagh (Codex Ardmachanus) TCD MS 52: This is perhaps the most famous and important manuscript containing St Patrick's *Confessio*. It dates

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<sup>6</sup> Elva Johnston, 'Being Christian in Late Antique Ireland' in Katja Ritari, Jan R Stenger and William Van Andringa (eds), *Being Pagan, Being Christian in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*, vol 4 (Helsinki University Press 2023) 235 <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/jj.10153600.14>>.

<sup>7</sup> Johnston (n 4) 257.

<sup>8</sup> Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (University of California Press 1977).

back to the early 9th century (807AD) and is held at the Library of Trinity College Dublin. The Book of Armagh is a compilation of texts related to St Patrick, and it includes both the *Confessio* and the *Epistola*, another of his writings.<sup>9</sup>

- Cotton Manuscript (British Library, Cotton MS Nero E.I): This manuscript from the British Library also contains the *Confessio*. It dates from the 11th century and is another crucial source for studying St Patrick's works.
- Royal Irish Academy MS D II 3 (Stowe Missal): This manuscript is a less direct source but includes excerpts and references to St Patrick's writings, providing additional context and variations in the textual tradition.
- Additional fragments and excerpts: Various other manuscripts and fragments across Europe contain parts of or references to the *Confessio*, which scholars use to understand the dissemination and impact of St Patrick's writings.

McCarthy uses the above sources directly and through other sources and translations. McCarthy uses these manuscripts to understand the textual variations and to reconstruct the most accurate and accessible version of the *Confessio* for a modern audience.<sup>10</sup> The scholarly consensus using the sources for the *Confessio* consider it to be the genuine writings of St Patrick. However there is much debate over the dates and particulars within the text.<sup>11 12</sup> This text will take this into consideration when analysing the motifs. There must have been some alteration from the original and numerous translational complexities, considering some hotly debated inconsistencies. However, with the motifs ever present they offer us an interesting hagiographical source.

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<sup>9</sup> Roman Bleier, 'Re-Examining the Function of St Patrick's Writings in the Early Medieval Tradition' [2016] *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 116 95; McCarthy (n 2) 37.

<sup>10</sup> McCarthy

<sup>11</sup> Thomas O'Loughlin, *Saint St Patrick: The Man and His Works* (SPCK 2014) 16–18.

<sup>12</sup> McGrath Isabella Christina (n 1) 33–45.

## General Themes and Motifs

St Patrick's *Confessio* is a fascinating text, both for its historical and religious significance. It is a pseudo-autobiographical and apologetic work, providing insight into St Patrick's thoughts, feelings, and motivations. The following are some of the more general themes that are found in the *Confessio*, ordered top to bottom from my qualitative assessment of strongest expression to least. Following this I will analyse a few, more specific motifs.

### Divine Call and Mission

St Patrick frequently speaks of his calling by God to serve the people of Ireland, despite his unworthiness and limitations. This theme of divine calling underscores his mission as a bishop and missionary, and his belief that his work was guided by divine providence. This theme is found throughout the text. It is exhibited in a broad sense from his initial capture in chapter 1, "because we had gone away from God", <sup>13</sup> through to the last chapter where he attributes his entire mission to God, "Instead, you can judge and believe in all truth that it was a gift of God". <sup>14</sup> It can also be seen in specific focused examples such as in chapter 34 where he attributes a divine presence within himself to God's calling.<sup>15</sup>

### Exile and Suffering

Exile and suffering are prominent themes. St Patrick begins his narrative by recounting how he was captured and taken to Ireland as a slave. This personal history of suffering and exile is mirrored in his later life when he chooses to return to Ireland, the place of his enslavement, to preach the Gospel. These experiences frame his life's work as a form of spiritual exile, served far from his homeland. St Patrick strongly identifies himself as a foreigner in Ireland, however this can also be read spiritually as reflecting the separation that Christian perspectives have being in this world, which is at odds with their true home, in heaven.<sup>16</sup> Although I have not isolated slavery as a motif, I

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<sup>13</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 1.

<sup>14</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 32.

<sup>15</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 17.

<sup>16</sup> Johnston (n 4) 270.

must include it here. Beavis interestingly makes strong allegories to stories from North American slave narratives.<sup>17</sup> She references common features identified in these slave narratives by another author and links 9 out of 12 with the *Confessio*.<sup>18</sup> Exile and suffering are strongly represented within Christian traditions however slavery is a powerful motif encapsulated in most cultures and transcends Christian culture. The experience is used to its full affect in the *Confessio* and would speak to many.

### Spiritual Conversion

Conversion is a central theme, not only St Patrick's own conversion during his captivity when he turns to God with fervour, but also his lifelong mission as an instrument of God in order to convert the Irish people.<sup>19</sup> His efforts to bring Christianity to an island, considered then at the edge of the known world, is a theme that resonates throughout the text.<sup>20</sup>

### Dreams and Visions

St Patrick often references dreams and visions that guide and affirm his mission in Ireland. These supernatural experiences serve as divine communications, giving him confidence and authority in his evangelical efforts. This motif highlights the mystical and spiritual dimensions of his life and work. It is also the primary medium by which his divine callings are transmitted and thus is expanded on later as a motif.

### Forgiveness and Redemption

The themes of forgiveness and redemption are intricately woven into St Patrick's narrative, providing the rationale for the saint's work, that being the salvation of the Irish people.<sup>21</sup> He frequently discusses forgiving those who wronged him and focuses on the redemptive power of God in his life and the lives of his converts citing biblical verse such as, "1 Timothy 1:12: I give thanks to the one who strengthened me"<sup>22</sup> and "Psalm 49 (50):15: Call on me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you will glorify

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Ann Beavis, 'Six Years a Slave: The *Confessio* of St Patrick as Early Christian Slave Narrative' (2020) 85 *Irish Theological Quarterly* 339.

<sup>18</sup> Beavis (n 16) 4–5.

<sup>19</sup> Johnston (n 4) 259.

<sup>20</sup> Johnston (n 4) 257.

<sup>21</sup> Johnston (n 4) 258.

<sup>22</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 34.

me”<sup>23</sup> among others. This reflects broader Christian principles and emphasizes his belief in the transformative power of faith and forgiveness.

### Struggle Against Paganism

Inglebert addresses the impossible definition of the term ‘pagan’ and rejects such broad categorisations.<sup>24</sup> I share this view for this text however I will use the term pagan as a blanket term to refer to those populations that St Patrick saw himself as responsible for converting, the non-Christian Irish. St Patrick’s *Confessio* describes his struggles against the pagan Irish royalty, who opposed his Christian teachings, such as in chapter 42 where he describes the familial resistance of a female convert that he baptised.<sup>25</sup> This conflict between Christianity and paganism is a critical aspect of his mission, reflecting the religious and cultural transformation occurring in Ireland during this period.<sup>26</sup>

### Humility and Unworthiness

A recurring theme in the *Confessio* is St Patrick’s sense of his own unworthiness and humility. He often mentions his lack of education and eloquence, presenting himself as a simple man chosen by God, which serves to highlight the miraculous nature of his achievements.<sup>27</sup>

These motifs not only provide a deep insight into St Patrick’s personal beliefs and spiritual experiences but also reflect broader themes in Christian literature such as divine guidance, redemption, and the power of faith. The *Confessio* uses these motifs to weave a compelling narrative of a life devoted to spiritual service and missionary work.

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<sup>23</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 33.

<sup>24</sup> Hervé Inglebert, ‘EPILOGUE: Vanishing Identity: The Impossible Definition of Pagans and Paganism in the West from the 4th to the 6th Century’ in Katja Ritari, Jan R Stenger and William Van Andringa (eds), *Being Pagan, Being Christian in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*, vol 4 (Helsinki University Press 2023) <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/jj.10153600.17>>.

<sup>25</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 22.

<sup>26</sup> Johnston (n 4).

<sup>27</sup> DR Howlett, ‘Review of *Cambro-Latin Compositions, Their Competence and Craftsmanship; Liber Epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi: The Book of Letters of Saint St Patrick the Bishop*’ (2001) 116 *The English Historical Review* 405, 407.

## Individual Motifs

### *Wilderness*

The motif of "wandering in the wilderness" in St Patrick's *Confessio* is deeply linked with Biblical motifs and serves as a powerful spiritual metaphor that bridges his personal experiences with broader Christian theology.

In the *Confessio* St Patrick recounts his life, including his capture by Irish raiders, his enslavement and subsequent life in Ireland and generally likens these to a period of spiritual wilderness. More specifically this motif reaches its greatest expression on his return to Britain, where he writes about travelling through a wilderness for twenty-eight days.<sup>28</sup> This metaphorical and physical wilderness, like that experienced by the Israelites in the Old Testament, represents a time of trial, isolation, and dependence on divine providence. This is then ultimately rewarded by God both when a herd of pigs appears<sup>29</sup> and then in a more general theme when he returns to his parents in Britain.<sup>30</sup> The following are a few ways this motif in the *Confessio* connects with Biblical narratives:

#### Exodus and the Israelites

The most direct biblical parallel is the forty-year period during which the Israelites wandered in the desert after escaping from Egypt. This time was characterized by hardship and testing but was also crucial for the spiritual formation of the Israelite nation. Similarly, St Patrick's time of enslavement and isolation was a period of deep spiritual growth and reliance on God, in St Patrick's own words, "It was there that the Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith".<sup>31</sup>

#### Jesus in the wilderness

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<sup>28</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 9–12.

<sup>29</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 10.

<sup>30</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 12.

<sup>31</sup> McCarthy (n 2) 1.

In the New Testament,<sup>32</sup> Jesus spends forty days and nights in the wilderness, fasting and being tempted by Satan. This period, directly preceding his public ministry, was essential for spiritual preparation. St Patrick's experience in Ireland can be viewed similarly, as a time that prepared a naive youthful St Patrick for his later work in converting the Irish to Christianity.<sup>33</sup> He also attributes his deliverance by God in his own perspective quoting biblical verse such as "Call on me in the day of your distress, and I will set you free, and you will glorify me".<sup>34</sup>

#### Spiritual purification and preparation

Wilderness motifs in the Bible often symbolize times of purification and preparation for a greater purpose or mission. St Patrick interprets his suffering and trials in Ireland as a preparation for his calling to serve the people who had once enslaved him.

#### Divine revelation and guidance

Just as Biblical figures often receive God's guidance during their wilderness experiences, St Patrick frequently describes how his faith deepened and how he received divine visions and dreams that guide him throughout, particularly notable is his calling to escape and seek his ship for his return home.<sup>35</sup>

These connections between St Patrick's experiences and Biblical themes not only illustrate his own view of his life and mission but frame it within his contemporary spiritual narrative. This would have made his messages more compelling to any Christian reader but interestingly show how these motifs informed his own perspective during his life.

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<sup>32</sup> *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (National Council of Churches 1989).

<sup>33</sup> Pádraig McCarthy, *My Name Is Patrick: St Patrick's Confessio* (Royal Irish Academy 2008) 5 <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt14jxtjc.2>>.

<sup>34</sup> McCarthy (n 30) 3.

<sup>35</sup> McCarthy (n 30) 8–9.

### *Divine Visions (including dreams)*

In Saint St Patrick's "Confessio," divine visions and dreams are pivotal elements that both initiate and validate his missionary activities. These experiences are interpreted as direct communications from God, guiding and reinforcing St Patrick's commitment to his work in Ireland. The visions are relayed in the following ways within the text.

#### Direct Divine Communication

Visions and dreams in the Confessio are portrayed as God speaking directly to St Patrick. They are not just symbolic or metaphorical but are treated as literal messages from God, guiding St Patrick's actions and decisions. This interpretation is crucial because it frames St Patrick's mission as not merely a personal choice but as an obedience to divine command.

#### Validation of Mission

The visions and dreams serve to validate St Patrick's missionary work. For example, the dream delivering him letters from the Irish, pleading for him to come and walk among them again, serves as a divine endorsement of his calling to return to Ireland. This vision is presented as a clear and unmistakable sign that his mission is heaven-sent and that he is chosen by God for this purpose.

#### Assurance and Encouragement

St Patrick's dreams often come at times of doubt or danger, providing reassurance and encouragement. In one instance, when faced with a critical decision, he receives a dream in chapter 40 that alludes to Psalm 91,<sup>36</sup> which promises God's protection to those who trust in him.<sup>37</sup> This interpretation of the dream not only strengthens his resolve but also comforts him with the assurance of divine protection and guidance.

#### Spiritual Authority and Legitimacy

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<sup>36</sup> *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (National Council of Churches 1989).

<sup>37</sup> McCarthy (n 30) 20–21.

These divine visions and dreams also serve to establish St Patrick's spiritual authority. By sharing these experiences, St Patrick legitimizes his position as a missionary and a leader in the eyes of his followers and detractors alike. The divine origin of his calling underscores his authority to preach and convert, beyond any earthly commission.

### Conversion and Personal Transformation

Finally, visions and dreams also signify moments of personal conversion and transformation for St Patrick. They mark his transition from a captive shepherd to a missionary bishop, highlighting a radical change not only in his circumstances but in his spiritual life. This transformation is seen as guided and blessed by God, further emphasizing the divine influence in his life.

### Prophetic Calling

St Patrick views his work not just as a missionary activity but as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy. He often links his experiences and the success of Christianity in Ireland to the prophecies in the Bible, seeing himself as an instrument in the unfolding of God's plan. The most notable scene in the whole *Confessio*<sup>38</sup> is highlighted by O'Loughlin as a structured three-step call, closely modelling that of Samuel (1 Samuel 3).<sup>39 40</sup> It should be noted here that St Patrick had some accusations against him relating to his return to Ireland with hopes of enriching himself.<sup>41</sup> A response to these allegations is directly discussed in the *Confessio*.<sup>42</sup> However, these accusations would have no doubt informed other parts of the same work and potentially influenced his use of this motif to shield his mission against any criticism.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the motif of a prophetic calling is used as his reasoning to return to Ireland.

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<sup>38</sup> Pádraig McCarthy, *My Name Is Patrick: St Patrick's Confessio* (Royal Irish Academy 2008) 12–13 <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt14jxtjc.2>>.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas O'Loughlin Thomas O'Loughlin

<sup>40</sup> *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (National Council of Churches 1989).

<sup>41</sup> Roy Flechner, 'St Patrick's Reasons for Leaving Britain' in FIONA EDMONDS and PAUL RUSSELL (eds), *Tome: Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, vol 31 (Boydell & Brewer 2011) 125 .

<sup>42</sup> Pádraig McCarthy, *My Name Is Patrick: St Patrick's Confessio* (Royal Irish Academy 2008) 26 <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt14jxtjc.2>>.

<sup>43</sup> Elva Johnston, 'Being Christian in Late Antique Ireland' in Katja Ritari, Jan R Stenger and William Van Andringa (eds), *Being Pagan, Being Christian in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*, vol 4 (Helsinki University Press 2023) 258 <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/jj.10153600.14>>.

The prophetic calling comes in the form of visions, dreams and even an account of what is perhaps sleep paralysis.<sup>44</sup> Therefore rather than independently categorise this motif I have placed this motif within divine visions.

Through these interpretations, St Patrick's "Confessio" frames his life story as one of divine destiny and purpose, driven by visions and dreams that are unequivocally presented as manifestations of God's will.

### *Nature*

Nature in Confessio served as a source of imagery in which St Patrick sketched the transformation of his own identity. Linking to the previous motif of wilderness, nature is used to express this, St Patrick writes, "I even remained in the woods and on the mountain, and I would rise to pray before dawn in snow and ice and rain. I never felt the worse for it, and I never felt lazy—as I realise now, the spirit was burning in me at that time."<sup>45</sup> Here, St Patrick overlays nature with other themes and motifs. It is used as a wild force, one which requires suffering to endure, together with a devotion to God to persevere. Symbolism of nature in the Confessio transcends language barriers, since the forces of nature are a universal symbol system, something held dear by the mostly illiterate Irish.<sup>46</sup> His separation from Christendom is portrayed here only physically and not spiritually. The motif of his time as a shepherd, not only connects St Patrick with nature but also metaphorically aligns him with the biblical figure of David and with Christ, the Good Shepherd. This parallel is easily drawn and underscores his emerging role as a spiritual guide and protector.

### Sea and Travel

The Confessio is structured heavily on sea and travel motifs. This is again mirrored with the journey towards reconciliation and reunion with God. These motifs are

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<sup>44</sup> McCarthy (n 37) 10–11.

<sup>45</sup> McCarthy (n 37) 8.

<sup>46</sup> Elva Johnston, 'Irish Literacy in a Late Antique Context', *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland*, vol 33 (Boydell & Brewer 2013) 2  
<<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/10.7722/j.ctt31njhm.5>>.

predicated on and expressive of the psychological and existential dislocation caused by his abduction and forced exile from home and family in Roman Britain. His abduction, a result of his distance from God. This is contrasted with the journey towards reconciliation and reunion with God. St Patrick's travels on the physical sea are the vehicle and interface for spiritual progression and regression. They are turned into a setting for a theodicy of a particular kind - a trial and testing endured and passed only through his faith in God. Which fittingly blends with the final motif I wish to include, that of the hero.

## *Hero*

"C. G. Jung saw the hero myth as reflecting a stage of development, guiding the transition process from adolescence to adulthood".<sup>47</sup> It is in the *Confessio* we see St Patrick catalogue his life from boyhood to holy man in a sequence of divinely inspired junctions. Although he maintains his self-confessed humbleness throughout, he also attributes any positive workings through him to God. I will avoid too much psychoanalysis in this text as it extends the scope of the brief and my research, however it must be noted that these mythological and psychological categories, found within the human condition, such as that of the hero,<sup>48</sup> present themselves strongly within St Patrick's *Confessio*. Creuzer ordered his hero-myth-archetypes into demonic, heroic, and divine.<sup>49</sup> The credit given to God by St Patrick for his story would certainly find itself expressed by the divine hero, as Bray also discusses in her thesis.<sup>50</sup> Although much modification to Jungian archetypes has occurred since his writings,<sup>51</sup> he saw significance and drew parallels in hero myths of symbolically killing one's parent.<sup>52</sup> One could draw strong comparisons with St Patrick having his boyhood and youth, ignorant of God, being vanquished by his divine interventions. Therefore, his

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<sup>47</sup> Isabelle Meier, 'The Classic, Banished, and Negative Hero' (2021) 15 *Jung Journal* 36, 37 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2021.1862593>>.

<sup>48</sup> RA Segal, 'Kinds of Myths' in Robert A Segal (ed), *Jung on Mythology*, vol 2 (Princeton University Press 1998) 123–146 <<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/j.ctv10crg5b.9>>.

<sup>49</sup> in Meier (n 39) 39.

<sup>50</sup> Bray Ann Dorothy, 'The Lives of the Early Irish Saints: A Study in Formulaic Composition and the Creation of an Image' (University of Edinburgh 1982) 90–91.

<sup>51</sup> Meier (n 41) 41.

<sup>52</sup> Meier (n 41) 40.

humbleness is preserved, and it is God, who creates a divine hero through him via fate and his own surrender. Particularly in the motif of his divine calling, something which is essentially imposed on him through being taken into slavery in his youth, a peregrination that is against his will or in circumstances out of his control.<sup>53</sup> If we return to the themes discussed in the first part of this section, we can see these interconnect with the hero motif:

Divine Call and Mission – Something known only to God, but through faith, St Patrick would facilitate.

Exile and Suffering – Atonement and penance, to test and realise St Patrick's fate.

Spiritual Conversion – St Patrick's surrender and realisation of his greater purpose.

Dreams and Visions – God's primary medium of transmission.

Forgiveness and Redemption – Through these actions he is deemed worthy for God's mission.

Struggle Against Paganism – The physical outcome of God's mission through St Patrick.

Humility and Unworthiness – Through this St Patrick surrenders all the credit for his work to God, the true hero.

Bray in her thesis discusses the hero image of the Christian saint.<sup>54</sup> She draws parallels with the Desert Fathers of the Eastern Church and the hero within Irish tradition. She also provides a scheme compiled from other authors for heroic biographical patterns.<sup>55</sup> Bray uses this scheme to analyse St Patrick's life against Muirchú's *Life of St Patrick*.<sup>56 57</sup> I have chosen to do the same using the *Confessio* and include all the corresponding schemes present. In bold are the relevant schemes and below is my correspondence with the *Confessio*.

## **IB – Father is a king or chief.**

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<sup>53</sup> Bray Ann Dorothy (n 44) 94.

<sup>54</sup> Bray Ann Dorothy (n 44).

<sup>55</sup> Bray Ann Dorothy (n 43) 93–94. Full list of schemes

<sup>56</sup> Bray Ann Dorothy (n 43) 98. Analysis by Bray of the schemes present in Muirchú's *Life of St Patrick*.

<sup>57</sup> Ludwig Bieler, 'Muirchú's *Life of St. Patrick* as a Work of Literature' (1974) 43 *Medium Ævum* 219

St Patrick states his father was a Deacon.

### **III – The youth of the saint and his upbringing**

Although I could not explicitly link any of the scheme under Bray's scheme **III**, I found it does correspond to St Patrick's initial chapter. St Patrick describes his abduction into slavery as divinely brought about, and that his slavery, suffering and exile become his teacher.

#### **IV C - The saint spends some time in the wilderness as a hermit and practises a severe regime of asceticism.**

For the Confessio, this is his time in slavery.

#### **V - The saint founds a monastery and attracts disciples**

Despite St Patrick discussing little about his material achievements in Ireland in his Confessio, he attracts many converts about him and leads local women and men into chastity, stated in chapters 41 and 42.<sup>58</sup> It would be naive to assume there were not multiple institutions and locations setup for his converts.

#### **VI A - The saint contends with the local pagan chieftain or magician, or with a monster. He is victorious and gains converts.**

St Patrick describes the familial resistance due to a local noblewoman having converted.<sup>59</sup>

#### **VI B - The saint has a vision of heaven or is taken up to visit heaven.**

St Patrick has many visions as referred to throughout this text.

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<sup>58</sup> McCarthy (n 37) 22.

<sup>59</sup> McCarthy (n 37) 22.

The above links show that of the nine schemes that Bray categorises, five of the categories are found within the Confessio and six (IV A & IV B sub categories) in total. The ones absent pertain to the death and birth of the saint. Both of which St Patrick does not address. He discusses his approaching death but ascribes nothing more to it. Considering the Confessio's genre it is not surprising the author omits talking about the events of his own death. Therefore, if one removes these death related categories (VII, VIII, IX) from the total leaving the six general categories (I, II, III, IV, V, VI), the Confessio contains examples of all except for II, relating to the birth of the saint. St Patrick also possesses all the attributes which fit Czarnowski's heroic classification and thus the hero motif in general, and more specifically, a divinely legitimised hero motif, is strongly portrayed within the Confessio.<sup>60</sup>

## *Conclusion*

It has been my intention through this essay to analyse a range of motifs within the life of St Patrick as told by St Patrick. Firstly, through identifying broader themes with the intention of isolating more individual motifs, it became clear that any number of motifs and divisions may in principle be made. Within every motif there has been unimpeded overlap with multiple others. This can be expected for any piece of text, especially one associating itself with a tradition such as Christianity. Nevertheless, this overlap provided a focus on defining the motif. I thus attempted to identify not only the most apparent to me, but the most prominent and common motifs found in other texts and traditions, which were: wilderness, divine visions, nature and hero.

The choice of choosing the Confessio was primarily due to its personal first-hand nature. However, somewhat more interestingly, because it can be seen to contrast with the later stage development of hagiographical formats. Where artistic licence, political motivations, and personal biases all compound toward a more stereotypical

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<sup>60</sup> McCarthy (n 37) 74.

and standardised format.<sup>61 62</sup> With Muirchú's Life of St. Patrick following much of this format, the Confessio on the other hand evidences motifs and themes that were present on the frontier of Christendom and contemporary with St Patrick's mission. These motifs are still expressed and exaggerated in later texts as they use them as primary sources and foundational inspiration, always adding to the narrative with succeeding generations, never subtracting.<sup>63</sup> However the Confessio provides us a chronologically earlier and less compounded version of the life of St Patrick, allowing us to see the core motifs associated with an early Celtic Saint. These motifs reflect the culture he found himself in and exhibit echoes of pagan traditions, particularly the nature and hero motifs which are well identified and known within pagan sagas and culture.<sup>64</sup> However the wilderness and divine vision motifs contrast this and link it equally strongly with Christian motifs. This is unsurprising as the Romano British world blended with the Celtic during this time and continental ideas acculturated Ireland.<sup>65 66</sup> <sup>67</sup> It is also unsurprising that a core human motif and archetype, such as that of the hero, would find itself so strongly expressed within the Confessio. St Patrick paints himself as a humble man, no doubt of great faith, who achieves notable works during his mission, exhibiting hero like qualities. However as aforementioned, these qualities are not claimed by himself, but attributed to God. It is God that is the hero, hence the sub categorisation of divine hero.

I do not however get a sense that the author intentionally wrote this most evident motif into the Confessio. With St Patrick spending much of the Confessio responding to his accusers, either directly or indirectly by way of justifying his mission, he paints this heroic image of God, through himself. It is poignantly shown in the following words of the final chapter: "Some of them may happen to inspect or come upon this writing which St Patrick, a sinner without learning, wrote in Ireland. May none of them ever say that whatever little I did or made known to please God was done through ignorance. Instead, you can judge and believe in all truth that it was a gift of God. This

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<sup>61</sup> Bray Ann Dorothy (n 44) 100.

<sup>62</sup> McCarthy (n 37) 43.

<sup>63</sup> Bray Ann Dorothy (n 44) 100.

<sup>64</sup> Bray Ann Dorothy (n 44) 175.

<sup>65</sup> Bray Ann Dorothy (n 44) 182.

<sup>66</sup> Johnston (n 38) 236.

<sup>67</sup> Johnston (n 41) 2–3.

is my confession before I die.”<sup>68</sup> Thus the principal motif, divine hero, is indirectly rendered and attributed to St Patrick through his faith, but also his motives for writing. A motive to justify his mission shines through the text as the core motive for its production. Perhaps had he not had accusations laid against him, he would not have written the *Confessio*. Ultimately therefore he would not have laid the foundations for the later cult and hero of Saint St Patrick. Fortunately for us, and literature as a whole, he did, and is recognised as a saint, largely as a result of the divine hero motif that projects from the *Confessio*.

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<sup>68</sup> McCarthy (n 37) 32.

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